United Nations E/CN.3/2002/28

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 December 2001

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Thirty-third session
5-8 March 2002
Item 7 (h) of the provisional agenda*
Activities not classified by field: dissemination of statistics by the United Nations Statistics Division

Dissemination of statistics by the United Nations Statistics Division

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report was prepared at the request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-second session.**

Dissemination policy for United Nations publications (including electronic products and via the Internet) is established by the United Nations Publications Board, which also approves the biennial publications programme based on mandates from intergovernmental bodies. Various intergovernmental bodies which have discussed dissemination, including the budget and programme committees, the Committee on Information and the Committee on Conferences, have repeatedly emphasized the importance of ensuring economy, quality, relevance and cost recovery in United Nations publications. Most of the United Nations Statistics Division publications of statistics are based on Statistical Commission mandates from the 1940s and 1950s, which have been periodically reviewed by the Commission and evaluated by user groups to ensure their continuing relevance.

According to official policy, free dissemination of publications is made to Member States' missions to the United Nations, the United Nations libraries and United Nations depository libraries, and the United Nations Statistics Division's partners in the global statistical system, i.e., national and international statistical services. The sale of publications is the responsibility of the Sales and Marketing Section of the Division of Publications of the United Nations Secretariat. United

* E/CN.3/2002/1.

** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2001, Supplement No. 4* (E/2001/24), chap. I, sect. A.

01-68211 (E) 080102

Nations Statistics Division publications of statistics are the Section's largest revenue earners, accounting for more than one third of the gross revenue of the United Nations from sales of Secretariat publications.

The United Nations Statistics Division pioneered the development of CD-ROM publications in the Secretariat and is continuously seeking to expand their coverage. The Division has also actively developed statistics dissemination on its Internet site, but with the Internet still in a stage of rapid technological development and the totally different expectations that users bring to Internet as far as pricing and ease of use are concerned, neither the Organization nor the Division has reached a clear consensus on an effective pricing policy.

Points for discussion by the Commission are contained in paragraph 37.

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I. Responsibility for dissemination policies

A. Publications Board

1. The dissemination of United Nations Statistics Division publications, including CD-ROM and Internet materials, is guided by publications policies established for the United Nations Secretariat as a whole. Those policies are determined by the Publications Board, which is made up of representatives of the principal author departments, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, of which the Statistics Division is a part, and of the Department of Public Information, the Department of Conference Services, the Department of Administration and Management and the Office of Legal Affairs.

2. The Board's mandate is to plan and supervise the execution of the biennial publications programme of the organization, plan the allocation of the budget for external publications and the allocation of internal reproduction capacity, and determine policies concerning such issues as copyright, dissemination, attribution of authorship, permission to outside publishers to reproduce United Nations materials, including translation, use of the United Nations emblem, and the designation of United Nations depository libraries. The Board meets infrequently, as the need for major policy decisions arises, as well as to approve reports and recommendations on the biennial publications programme, the United Nations depository libraries and the Sales and Marketing Section etc., as needed. Since December 1992, the Board's secretariat has been located in the Department of Public Information.

3. The routine administrative and executive functions of the Board are delegated to the Board's Working Committee, which meets monthly. The Committee is chaired by the director of the Library and Information Resources Division, Department of Public Information. A new working group on Internet matters has recently been established, also responsible to the Publications Board, and chaired by the director of the Information Technology Section, Department of Public Information. This group is mandated to coordinate United Nations Secretariat and Internet sites and home pages (see ST/AI/2002/5). As it has only recently been established, its functions and responsibilities have yet to be worked out in practice.

B. Legislative mandates for recurrent publications

4. The intergovernmental mandates for statistics dissemination are set by the Statistical Commission and cover recurrent printed publications, CD-ROMs databases and Internet. The mandates are currently reviewed every two years as part of the review of the United Nations Statistics Division work plan. That practice was cited in a 1993 report of the Secretary-General on publications policy to the Fifth (budget) Committee of the General Assembly as "an appropriate model for other bodies" (see A/C.5/48/30, para. 14). It is now recommended to the other functional commissions as part of the process of preparing the budget and publications programme.

5. The original general Statistical Commission mandate for the compilation and dissemination of international statistics is set out below.

Publication of statistics

6. International publications relating to statistics, regular and occasional, will be a normal and useful consequence of the collection and analysis of statistics from member Governments, specialized agencies and other sources for the various organs, departments and divisions of the United Nations (see report of the Statistical Commission on its first (nuclear) session (E/39), paras. 33 and 41).

7. The mandates of specific recurrent publications are as follows:

(a) The *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*, the *Statistical Yearbook*, and the yearbooks of industrial statistics, trade statistics and energy supplies were previously compiled and published by the League of Nations. The Commission, at its first (nuclear) session, recommended that action be taken promptly to ensure maintenance without interruption of the valuable statistical work of the Economic, Financial and Transit Department of the League of Nations and of other statistical activities carried on under the sponsorship of the League (see E/39, para. 5). The Commission also noted, with respect to the recommended maintenance by the United Nations Statistics Division of an international centre for statistics, that the end in view was that of making generally available non-confidential statistics pertaining to international affairs and not merely of establishing a routine international

documentation service (see E/39, para. 41). That recommendation was accepted by the General Assembly in its resolution of 12 February 1946 on the transfer of League functions, activities and assets to the United Nations (see A/64, p. 35), and by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 23 (III) of 2 October 1946;

(b) *Demographic Yearbook* and *Population and Vital Statistics Report*: in 1948, the Statistical Commission recommended that demographic data concerning the different countries of the world be assembled and published by the United Nations (see E/264, para. 43);

(c) National accounts: also in 1948, the Commission recommended that publication of national income and expenditure data be undertaken promptly in order to provide comparable figures for as many countries as possible (see E/264, para. 42);

(d) *Compendium of Human Settlements Statistics*: originally published beginning in 1971 as the Compendium of Housing Statistics. At its sixteenth session, in 1970, the Commission approved the United Nations Statistics Division programme of work to include the international publication of results of population and housing censuses (see E/4938, para. 114 (27)). Coverage was broadened in the third issue in response to General Assembly resolution 34/114 on a regular global report on human settlements and the endorsement of the Statistical Commission at its twenty-first session (see E/1981/12, para. 116);

(e) *World Statistics Pocketbook*: undertaken in response to General Assembly resolution 2626 (XXV) on the Second International Development Decade. The *Pocketbook* responds to the Assembly's request to supply adequate basic national data to increase international public awareness of countries' development efforts;

(f) *Energy Balances and Electricity Profiles*: the regular issuance of this new publication was approved by the Statistical Commission at its twentieth session, in 1979, on the basis of recommendations of the Expert Group on Classification and Measurement in the Field of Energy Statistics (see E/1979, paras. 15 and 23 (a)). That recommendation was affirmed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1981/2, on international energy statistics.

8. In response to the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit in its report on recurrent publications of the United Nations (JIU/REP/71/8), the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1713 (LIII), affirmed the necessity of continuing the *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* and the *Statistical Yearbook* in their current form, as recommended by the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its fourth session. The Statistical Commission, at its seventeenth session, in 1972, supported the recommendations of the Working Group and reaffirmed the importance of the statistics publications in the Statistical Office's programme of work (E/5236, paras. 173 and 180).

II. United Nations Statistics Division publications, 2000-2001

9. The printed publications, electronic outputs and Internet home pages prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division and issued in 2000-2001 for the dissemination of statistics are listed in annexes II and III; all are contained in the biennial publications programme as approved by the Publications Board, and the dissemination policies set out below are applicable to them.

A. Free distribution of printed books and CD-ROMs

10. Pursuant to established dissemination policy, all United Nations Statistics Division print publications are distributed by the Organization free of charge to United Nations Member States' missions in New York, libraries of specialized agencies and United Nations centres, and United Nations depository libraries, amounting to approximately 600 copies. In addition, the Division distributes publications free of charge to a mailing list of its national and international partners in international data collection, for additional free distribution. All other United Nations offices may request single copies of specific publications on an ad hoc basis, free of charge.

11. Partly in response to severe public and media criticism in the 1980s of the quantity and relevance of United Nations publications, the General Assembly's Committee on Information and Committee on Conferences have urged that free distribution be

limited so as to meet legitimate official needs for publications at the working level, while maintaining a potential for earning revenues through sales. The objectives should be to maximize sales and minimize duplication in the distribution of documents.

12. In principle, therefore, free distribution is limited to the recipients described above, plus working copies for the author departments. Copies for conferences, training and similar demands for multiple copies are to be printed using additional funding to cover the costs involved. Accordingly, the United Nations Statistics Division usually requests about 200 copies for its own use, in addition to its mailing list. Reprints of publications are arranged, if needed, on a user-purchase basis.

13. Most United Nations Statistics Division CD-ROMs are distributed at no charge to United Nations system libraries and major reference centres and to national and international statistical services. They are also available free of charge to any United Nations system office on request and to missions to the United Nations.

B. CD-ROM sales

14. The United Nations Statistics Division was one of the first units of the Secretariat to prepare CD-ROMs for sales, including for several years the *Statistical Yearbook* and *Women's Indicators and Statistics Database*, the *Trade Analysis System, Five-year Time Series* (prepared by the International Trade Centre as a joint product with the Statistics Division) and more recently the *Demographic Yearbook Historical Supplement*. Those CD-ROMs have been prepared using interface software developed by or with the Division. Sales of CD-ROMs have been modest but appear to be growing from year to year, and currently number in the several hundreds for each issue of most products. The Publications Sales and Marketing Section provided extensive development funding for several of those products.

C. Sales and marketing services

15. Sales of publications is the responsibility of the Publications Sales and Marketing Section, which is expected to be self-supporting. The Sales and Marketing Section cooperates with the United Nations Statistics Division in the promotion of statistical publications and in user surveys.

16. Approximately 36 per cent of gross sales revenue of the Sales and Marketing Section derives from United Nations Statistics Division publications (about $1.8 million per year). The greatest revenue earners are the *Statistical Yearbook*, the *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*, the *Demographic Yearbook* and (at a much lower level) the various other yearbooks of trade statistics, energy statistics, industrial commodities production and national accounts.

17. By far the bulk of orders are standing orders from libraries in North America and Western Europe, but the number of orders from Asia has been increasing significantly in recent years.

III. Pricing policy

A. Print publications

18. The United Nations Finance Manual states that the sales operation as a whole is intended to provide a profit to the Organization if that can be achieved without adversely affecting the dissemination to the public.

19. According to the latest administrative instruction for the pricing of United Nations publications, prices are no longer to be based solely on printing costs but also take into account other costs, such as marketing, design and editing, as well as market and industry circumstances and the quality and content of the publication from the viewpoint of market appeal (see ST/AI/189/Add.15/Rev.1).

B. CD-ROMs and databases

20. The pricing of CD-ROMs has generally followed the same practice. Similarly, databases and data extracts sold directly by the United Nations Statistics Division follow that practice but the revenues accrue to the Division's revenue account. The main source of income on that account is extracts from the Commodity Trade Statistics Database (COMTRADE) and dial-up access to COMTRADE in Geneva. The other database sales of the Division are ad hoc. Those databases are not provided with a user interface. The United Nations maintains copyright of those databases and negotiates

permission to redisseminate data from them. The standard price for such dissemination rights is five times the purchase price. To date, the general practice is not to grant such permission for Internet dissemination to third parties.

C. Internet materials

21. Official publications policy calls for consultation with the Sales Section when any publication is planned to be put on the Internet in order to protect the Organization's commercial interest in the material, where such an interest is deemed to exist (see ST/AI/189/Add.28 and ST/AI/2001/5).

22. The Sales and Marketing Section has provided significant financial support for the development of United Nations Statistics Division CD-ROMs and Internet publications (*Monthly Bulletin of Statistics Online, UNSTATS Common Database* and *Population and Vital Statistics Report* (quarterly)); accordingly, no attempt has been made until recently to allocate some of the revenue to the Division's revenue account. However, the Division has recently agreed on a revenue-sharing agreement for *UNSTATS Common Database* subscriptions, subject to administrative review.

23. In addition to the large dissemination databases on Internet (*Monthly Bulletin of Statistics Online* and the *UNSTATS Common Database*), the Division maintains several more specialized data files on the Internet which are free, such as data on social indicators and city populations. Plans are also under development to make specific extracts from the large databases freely available, such as the Millennium indicators, as country profiles from *UNSTATS*.

24. Consideration is also being given to license a commercial information service to make print publications of statistics available in a non-data base, in a page view format similar to PDF.

IV. User evaluation

25. In the last decade, the United Nations Statistics Division and the Sales and Marketing Section have cooperated on several user evaluation studies, covering the *Demographic Yearbook*, the *Statistical Yearbook*, the *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*, several of the Division's CD-ROMs and the *UNSTATS Common Database* on the Internet (see ESA/STAT/AC.46/1).

26. Since most of the Division's publications are provided to the public via intermediaries, such as librarians and documentalists, or are sold via commercial wholesalers (largely the case in Europe), it is difficult to identify actual users and uses. The evaluation and planning studies conducted have mainly worked with experienced reference librarians, requesting them to comment on interfaces for electronic products and to solicit the views of their own clients. Such indirect feedback has been important for streamlining presentation and interfaces and providing some general views on content but does not provide a reliable guide for marketing as a whole.

27. The only general guides available are the sales of publications and, more recently, the emergence of access measurements for Internet pages.

28. The information contained in annex II on publication sales has been provided by the Sales and Marketing Section as of 1 November 2001. However, the concepts and methods for measuring Internet use are still quite simplistic and disputed, often by orders of magnitude.

A. Print publications sales and revenue[1]

29. Two of the nine best-selling substantive publications of the Organization in 1998-1999 were prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division, the *Statistical Yearbook* and the *Demographic Yearbook*. Because of the much higher unit prices of United Nations Statistics Division yearbooks compared to most publications with significant sales, 10 of the 15 top revenue earners were from the Statistics Division: in order of gross revenue, the *Statistical Yearbook*, the *Demographic Yearbook*, the *International Trade Statistics Yearbook*, the *Statistical Yearbook CD-ROM*, the *National Accounts Statistics Yearbook*, the *Energy Statistics Yearbook* and the *Industrial Commodities Statistics Yearbook*. In addition, two of the three serial publications with the largest number of subscribers are prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division — the *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* and the *Population and Vital Statistics Report*. The largest revenue earner was the *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*.

B. Internet sites and page views

30. The quantification of Internet site traffic is complex and controversial. Page views, hits (especially the latter) and other measures are subject to various interpretations and qualifications, and are generally believed to inflate real user traffic or actual use. The United Nations Statistics Division has several important databases at its site and the quantification of those page views poses additional technical and interpretation problems.

31. Data provided on page views in annex III are based on access logs. An attempt has been made to exclude search site "spider" page views, which are automatically controlled by search engines, so as to measure database use and consolidate certain areas of the site dealing with a single subject without double-counting, given that repeat users may bookmark a page "behind" the home page which is being measured for direct access. The figures are for one month, July or September 2001.

32. The most heavily used sites (in terms of number of hits) for statistics and related references, according to that information, are the following:

(a) Social indicators data pages — 28,537;

(b) Population of capital cities and cities of 100,000 and more inhabitants data pages with maps — 26,387;

(c) Statistics Division home page, 24,713, and UNSD Publications Catalogue — 17,366;

(d) "Global statistics" home page — 16,138;

(e) InfoNation and Country at a Glance database (prepared by the Department of Public Information from the *World Statistics Pocketbook*) — 13,347;

(f) *UNSTATS UN Common Database*, data, (subscriber access only) — 13,330; metadata (free access) — 5,966.

33. The six sites mentioned in paragraph 32 above accounted for about 145,000 page views in the month studied. The remaining sites for statistics and related references, with over 4,000 page views in the reference month are the following:

(a) *Monthly Bulletin Statistics Online* (subscriber access only) — 7,979;

(b) International statistics links and reference — 6,501;

(c) *Population and Vital Statistics Report* (subscriber access only) — 6,176;

(d) Country and region codes for statistical use — 6,048;

(e) National data sources and links — 4,402;

(f) *World's Women 2000* data pages — 4,085.

34. The six sites mentioned in paragraph 33 above account for approximately 35,000 additional page views. The remaining, more active-Statistics Division statistics sites, not including demonstrations sites, include the home page (24,713) the Division's publications catalogue (17,366), international statistical links and references (6,501), national data sources and links (4,402) and population and housing census dates (2,000).

V. Multilingualism

35. It is a long-standing practice of the United Nations Statistics Division to publish statistical compilations in bilingual formats, English/French, pursuant to the mandate of the General Assembly to promote multilingualism in publications. The publications programme provides for translations, as needed, and some of the publication questionnaires are circulated in Spanish and Russian as well as English and French. Conventionally, for technical reasons, data compilations are issued in bilingual form, English/French.

36. The General Assembly has also asked that all Internet materials of the Organization be made available in all official languages. General United Nations web sites are prepared in all languages by the Department of Public Information but do not cover technical departmental publications or materials. Currently, language versions of Internet materials are rarely available from the author departments, and there are formidable budgetary, logistical and technical problems to be overcome in doing so. In the meantime, that gap is very partially alleviated by the web sites of the regional commissions, which use extensively a language other than English (French and to a lesser extent Russian and Spanish in Europe; Spanish in Latin America and the Caribbean; Arabic in Western Asia).

VI. Points for discussion

37. The Commission may wish to:

(a) Discuss experience and plans in countries and organizations with new dissemination policies and cost-recovery programmes, among other issues;

(b) Reaffirm the importance of the established print, electronic and Internet publications programmes for statistics, as detailed in annexes I-III;

(c) Reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations Statistics Division, as expressed in its 2002-2003 work programme, which the Commission endorsed at its thirty-second session, in 2001, to establish statistical databases in all the fields of competence of the Division, accessible through Internet;

(d) Suggest directions for the future in the dissemination of statistics.

Notes

[1] See "Report on the sale of publications 1998-1999", report to the Publications Board by the Sales and Marketing Section.

Annex I

List of administrative instructions on publications policy

Copyright in United Nations publications; general principles, practice and procedure (ST/AI/189/Add.6/Rev.4)

Covers and title pages of publications (ST/AI/189/Add.2)

Guidelines for publishing in an electronic format (ST/AI/189/Add.28)

Initiation, approval and execution of the United Nations biennial publications programme (ST/AI/189/Add.1/Rev.2)

Newsletters and other information materials in printed or electronic format (ST/AI/189/Add.19/Rev.1)

Pricing of United Nations publications (ST/AI/189/Add.15/Rev.1)

Principles governing the exchange of United Nations documents and publications (ST/AI/189/Add.4/Rev.1)

Principles governing United Nations depository libraries (ST/AI/189/Add.1/Rev.2)

United Nations Internet publishing (ST/AI/2001/5)

Use of the United Nations emblem on documents and publications (ST/AI/189/Add.21)

Annex II

United Nations statistical compilations prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division and released in 2000-2001

Print compilations and sales up to 1 November 2001

Compendium of Human Settlements Statistics 2001, 254 pp., $35, 142 copies

Demographic Yearbook 1998, 618 pp., $150, 2,445 copies

Energy Statistics Yearbook 1997, 570 pp. $100, 721 copies

Industrial Commodity Statistics Yearbook 1997, 921 pp., $115, 705 copies

Industrial Commodity Statistics Yearbook 1998, 907 pp., $115, 624 copies

International Trade Statistics Yearbook 1998, vol. I, 1,101 pp.; vol. II, 406 pp., $135, 1,548 copies

International Trade Statistics Yearbook 1999, vols. I and II, forthcoming

Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, annual subscription $525, $60 per copy, 1,096 copies

National Accounts Statistics: Main Aggregates and Detailed Tables, 1995, two volumes, 2,680 pp., $160, 997 copies

National Accounts Statistics: Main Aggregates and Detailed Tables, 1996-1997, two volumes, 3,752 pp., $160, 867 copies

Statistical Yearbook, forty-third issue, 899 pp., $125, 3,188 copies

Statistical Yearbook, forty-fourth issue, 879 pp., $125, 3,105 copies

Population and Vital Statistics Report (quarterly), annual subscription: $30; $10 per copy, 352 copies

World Statistics Pocketbook 1999, 237 pp., $10, 1,850 copies

World Statistics Pocketbook 2000, 239 pp., $10, 587 copies

The World's Women: Trends and Statistics, 200 pp., $16.95, 3,821 copies

Electronic

Demographic Yearbook, forty-ninth issue, *Historical Supplement 1948-1997*, CD-ROM, $149, 583 copies

Energy Statistics Database, 1950-1997 (ad hoc orders), $390

External Trade Statistics, from 1962 to present (ad hoc orders for extracts), $50 + $5 for each 1,000 elements up to 500,000 elements, and $2.50 for each 1,000 elements in excess of 500,000 elements

Industrial Statistics, part 1, *Commodity Production Statistics, 1958-1998* (ad hoc orders), $500

National Accounts Statistics, part 1, *Main Aggregates and Detailed Tables, 1970-1997* (ad hoc orders), $600

National Accounts Statistics, part 2, *Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Tables, 1970-1998* (ad hoc orders), $600 or $100 first file, $75 each additional

Statistical Yearbook, forty-fourth issue, CD-ROM, $199, 234 copies

Statistical Yearbook, forty-fifth issue, CD-ROM, $199, 48 copies

Trade Analysis System on Personal Computer 1995-1999, CD-ROM, *Harmonized System* or *SITC Rev.3*, five-year time series (1995-1999) of international trade statistics, with market share and trend analyses by country and product, jointly with the International Trade Centre, $900 for developed countries, $450 for developing countries and economies in transition

Women's Indicators and Statistics Database, Version 4, CD-ROM, $149, 335 copies

Annex III

Statistics and related references on the Internet and estimated page views, one month

Type of data	*Number of page views*
Disability statistics	1 902
InfoNation and Country at a Glance (with the Department of Public Information, based on *World Statistics Pocketbook*)	13 347
Monthly Bulletin of Statistics	
Online (monthly, subscriber access)	7 979
Demonstration version (free access)	15 530
Population and Vital Statistics Report (quarterly, subscriber access)	6 176
Population of capital cities and cities of 100,000 and more inhabitants (annual)	26 387
Social indicators (updated quarterly)	28 537
UNSTATS UN Common Database (updated quarterly)	
Data (subscriber access)	13 330
Metadata (free access)	5 966
Demonstration version (free access)	7 614
World's Women 2000	4 085
Home pages on the Internet for statistical sources (ad hoc updating)	
Industrial Statistics Yearbook (commodities list)	1 375
International statistics links and references for international statistics	6 501
National data sources and links	4 402
National publications and statistical yearbooks, current statistics and Internet sites	1 081
United Nations Statistics Division	24 713
Population and housing census dates, 1985-2004	2 000
United Nations Economic and Social Information System methods and data dictionary	1 150
United Nations Statistics Division publications (catalogue database)	17 366